

## Forest Legacy Project

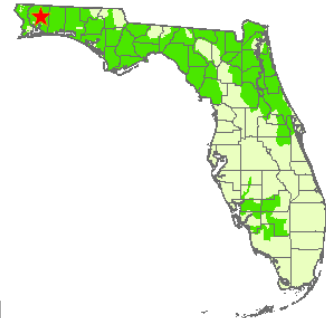
### Wolfe Creek Forest

Santa Rosa County, Florida, Florida



#### FUNDING HISTORY

FY 2017 Forest Legacy Program Funding	\$2,800,000
FY 2017 Non-Federal Cost Share	\$2,800,000
FY 2017 Project Costs	\$5,600,000
FY 2017 Project Acres	2,200
Forest Legacy Funding To Date	\$0
Total Project Costs	\$5,600,000
Total Project Acres	2,200



★ Project Location  
Forest Legacy Areas

Tract Name	Size (ac)	Tract Cost	FLP Funding	Non-Fed Cost Share	Status
Springhill	2,200	\$5,600,000	\$2,800,000	\$2,800,000	Proposed 2017

#### GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Springhill is 2,200 acres proposed for FEE purchase and is part of a 10,073-acre project called Wolfe Creek Forest that is being conserved in phases with numerous funding partners. Springhill is the first of two phases to use Forest Legacy funds. Springhill protects productive commercial forests adjacent to Blackwater River State Forest (BRSF) in the western Florida panhandle, precludes land use conflicts for military training and operations on nearby installations, and advances goals of state and federal agencies seeking to restore the longleaf pine ecosystem. The project fills gaps in the public conservation landscape, secures public recreation access and expands an existing network of public conservation land over more than 800,000 acres. Purchasing Springhill eliminates the demonstrable threat of residential development and preserves seepage and blackwater streams that support rare aquatic flora and fauna. Conservation partners include the Department of Defense, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Natural Resources Conservation Service, The Trust for Public Land and the Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership (GCPEP). Springhill will be managed as part of the adjacent BRSF.



Shallow waters of Coldwater Creek near the bluffs (Photo by Doug Hattaway)

#### PROJECT FEATURES

##### Important

- **ECONOMIC BENEFITS FROM TIMBER:** Springhill is certified for its sustainable management practices by the Forest Stewardship Council.
- Springhill contributes to the employment of 46 full time employees at Wolfe Creek Forest with

revenues in 2013 of \$715,000 from commercial timbering.

- Springhill contains predominantly commercial timberland consisting, in order of volume, of pine pulpwood (57%), pine chip and saw (26%), hardwood pulpwood (10%) and pine saw timber (7%), producing an estimated 120,000 annual tons over the multi-year harvest schedule.
- **ECONOMIC BENEFITS FROM NON-TIMBER PRODUCTS:** Springhill, as part of the larger Wolfe Creek Forest, contributes annual hunting lease revenue of \$55,000. Popular game includes deer, turkey and hogs.
- Springhill includes about seven miles of Big Coldwater Creek and Wolfe Creek, which are tourist destinations supported by two private commercial outfitters. One outfitter, Adventures Unlimited, alone reports over 40,000 customers a year.
- Springhill buffers the mission of NAS Whiting Field, which supports 14,600 jobs and has an economic impact of almost \$1 billion. The tract is targeted by NAS Whiting Field for permanent protection to preclude the risk of incompatible residential uses.
- **THREATENED OR ENDANGERED SPECIES HABITAT:** The Hairy-peduncled beakrush and the White-top pitcher plant are candidate species in USFWS Endangered Species database whose occurrence is documented on Springhill. Both species are also state endangered plants.
- The Gopher tortoise is a state threatened species and a candidate species for listing with the USFWS Endangered Species database and is documented on Springhill.
- The Spoonleaf sundew is a state-threatened plant documented on Springhill, which is a designated rare species habitat by the Florida Natural Areas Inventory.
- According to the Florida Natural Areas Inventory there are several documented active federally-endangered red-cockaded woodpecker colonies adjacent to Springhill and it is likely that the tract is within their foraging range.
- **FISH, WILDLIFE, PLANTS, AND UNIQUE FOREST COMMUNITIES:** Springhill is part of the Wolfe Creek Forest Florida Forever project designed to conserve stream systems and associated rare aquatic flora and fauna that are considered a focal habitat of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.
- GCPEP has identified Wolfe Creek Forest as its top conservation priority for habitat connectivity and longleaf pine restoration. In cooperation with the landowner, 150 acres have been restored with longleaf using funds from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Longleaf Stewardship Fund.
- Big Coldwater Creek is an extensive seepage/blackwater stream system supporting numerous rare vertebrates, invertebrates and plants like the Peters' cheumatopsyche caddisfly, Elerob's microcaddisfly, Southeastern weasel, Gulf Coast spiny softshell, diminutive clubtail and West Florida cowlily.
- **WATER SUPPLY AND WATERSHED PROTECTION:** Springhill recharges a sand and gravel aquifer that is the primary source of potable water for people in northern Santa Rosa County.
- Springhill includes over four miles of Big Coldwater Creek, which flows into Blackwater River, an Outstanding Florida Water, which flows into the Yellow River Marsh Aquatic Preserve. The Blackwater River and Yellow River Marsh are critical habitat for the federally endangered Gulf Sturgeon.
- **PUBLIC ACCESS:** Springhill's acquisition will further complete a gap in the state recreational trail system by providing a publicly accessible connection to the existing Blackwater Heritage Trail and Blackwater Multi-Use Trail located on either side of the property.
- Springhill straddles Big Coldwater Creek, which is a state-designated paddling trail and conserving Springhill will increase public access to it.
- Springhill includes a designated priority land trail segment by the State of Florida Office of Greenways



Beach on Coldwater Creek; seepage/blackwater streams provide critical habitat (Photo by Doug Hattaway)

and Trails.

- **SCENIC:** Springhill contains four miles along Big Coldwater Creek, a state-designated paddling trail. Acquisition will buffer and conserve this scenic waterway that enjoys substantial public use. One commercial vendor has over 40,000 customers a year.
- **HISTORIC/CULTURAL/TRIBAL:** There are 11 documented archaeological and historical sites on the Springhill tract recorded with the State Master Site File including a mill site and historic tram lines representative of the region's significant timbering heritage.

## Threatened

- **LACK OF PROTECTION:** Springhill zoning allows residential and commercial development, agriculture, recreational hunting and conservation uses. Most of the tract is zoned AG, which allows one dwelling unit per acre and a smaller portion is zoned AG-2, which allows one dwelling unit per 15 acres.
- The Santa Rosa County Rural Development Plan (2007) identifies a significant portion of the tract as containing prime farmland based on the presence of productive soils benefitting the forest's high productivity, yet threatening it with conversion to row crop agriculture.



Threatened gopher tortoise. Keystone species plays crucial role in ecosystem fct (Photo by Doug Hattaway)

- **LAND AND LANDOWNERS CIRCUMSTANCES:** The tract was acquired by CF Florida, LLC, a Timber Investment Management Organization, in 2006. The owner has a ten-year investment horizon and intends to sell the property in 2016 or as soon as a buyer is identified.
- A portion of Wolfe Creek Forest along Big Coldwater Creek and adjacent to Springhill was sold for residential development in 2015. The landowner has expressed that, if Springhill is not conserved, another 200 acres of Springhill is ready for sale for more residential subdivision and development.
- **ADJACENT LAND USE:** NAS Whiting Field is the busiest air station in the world. Base Realignment and Closure increased uses and training at the base and increased pressure to provide supporting land uses (i.e., residential and commercial developments).
- Santa Rosa County has led or leads the state in the production of cotton and peanuts and the number of acres in Class I prime farmland. The tract contains designated prime farmland soils making the forest's conversion to agriculture a threat.
- Santa Rosa County is one of Florida's fastest growing counties, within one of the nation's fastest growing regions. From 2000-2010 the County population grew 28.6%. Wolfe Creek Forest's proximity to Florida's beaches and waterways exacerbates development pressures to convert to residential uses.
- **ABILITY TO DEVELOP:** Electric connections are available and the tract recharges the underlying aquifer that can support rural development and cash crop farming if converted.

## Strategic

- **CONSERVATION STRATEGY:** GCPEP identifies Wolfe Creek Forest, including Springhill, as its #1 conservation priority to reestablish longleaf habitat.
- Springhill furthers the Longleaf Alliance's Longleaf Restoration Initiative and Significant Landscapes for Longleaf Pine Conservation, which support restored landscapes of over 100,000 acres, and is also within the GCPEP's focus area for longleaf forest restoration.
- Springhill's conservation will add to the largest contiguous longleaf landscape in the world with managing agency and private partners including Eglin Air Force Base, BRSF, and Conecuh National Forest and totaling over 1.05 million acres.
- Springhill's conservation supports Florida Forest Service 2010 Statewide Forest Action Plan by addressing several issues of importance to the state including: supporting sustainable forest markets,



reduce further fragmentation of longleaf pine ecosystems, meeting the challenges of climate change, improving the economic viability of forests, and protecting water quality and quantity.

- Springhill is part of the Wolfe Creek Forest Florida Forever project because of its stream systems, rare aquatic flora and fauna, and identification as a focal habitat of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.
- The Florida Office of Greenways and Trails identifies Big Coldwater Creek as a state-designated paddling trail and an overland segment though the property a priority gap ("Whiting Field to Blackwater State Forest Trail Corridor") in the state-wide trail network to connect the Blackwater Heritage State Trail and Blackwater Multi-Use Trail.
- Springhill is within one of the 16 Significant Geographic Areas of the Longleaf Pine Range-Wide Conservation Plan and part of the America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative. The USDA Farm Service Agency designated Wolfe Creek Forest's larger region a National Conservation Priority Area and is enrolling land in the region in the Conservation Reserve Program to incentivize longleaf restoration.
- NAS Whiting Field identifies the property within its area of concern for potential land use conflicts, with the intent to add the entirety of the property. Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative funding is available for the acquisition of property interests.
- **COMPLEMENT PROTECTED LANDS:** The Florida Department of Environmental Protection identifies the larger Wolfe Creek Forest, of which Springhill is a part, as a Florida Forever priority for its natural resources and habitats, and its role as a landscape connection between existing conservation lands totaling over 800,000 acres including Eglin Air Force Base, Whiting Field and Conecuh National Forest.
- The project would link publicly owned conservation lands on the north and south sides of the property and the two existing recreation trails: Blackwater Heritage Trail and Blackwater Multi-Use Trail supporting biking and hiking uses.



Wolfe Creek Forest is #1 Priority for Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership (Photo by Vernon Compton)

## Readiness

Pre-Appraisal/Market Analysis	1
Easement or Fee Conditions	1
Non-Federal Cost Share Commitment	0
Signed Purchase Agreement	0
Title Search	1
Mineral Determination	0
Stewardship Plan (or equivalent)*	1
<b>Readiness Total Tally Score</b>	<b>4</b>

## Supporting Parties

Trust for Public Land; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Santa Rosa County; Naval Air Station Whiting Field; Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership; National Fish and Wildlife Foundation; National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative; and Florida Department of Environmental Protection.



**For more information on the Forest Legacy Program, please contact:**

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